

Statement of Rep. Jim Leach
Chairman, Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific
Hearing on “East Timor: Instability and Future Prospects”
June 28, 2006

The Subcommittee meets today to discuss the timely topic “East Timor: Instability and Future Prospects.” We appreciate Deputy Assistant Secretary Eric John making himself available to testify on a situation that is still very much in flux.

East Timor has had friends in the U.S. Congress for many years preceding its emergence as a sovereign state in 2002, most notably my home state Senator Tom Harkin who has for decades been Congress’ most persistent advocate for the Timorese people. Thus, many in Washington have watched with concern and sadness the events of recent weeks, as circumstances on the ground spiraled into unexpected and violent lawlessness. We hope that, with the arrival of foreign peacekeepers and the resignation of former Prime Minister Alkatiri, the situation has turned a corner, and that the people of East Timor and their elected representatives can refocus their energies on constructing a stable and prosperous future. But with fresh violence and arson in the last 24 hours, we recognize how precarious the situation remains.

Before posing a few general questions to help frame our discussion today, I would like to note two important points.

First, we want to convey to East Timorese President Gusmao our wishes for every success in his efforts to form a government that will have enough popular support to end the political crisis, reinforce East Timor's democratic institutions, and promote the peace necessary for the economic development so desperately needed by his young nation.

Second, we want to express our thanks to those countries who have demonstrated such impressive regional leadership by responding to the East Timorese government’s request for troops to restore order. Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, and Portugal have committed their servicemen to the difficult and dangerous work of keeping the peace and disarming street gangs. We wish them safety and success in their mission, and note with admiration the regional security cooperation embodied by their joint efforts.

It is my hope that today's hearing will help provide answers to the following questions:

- What are the current political, security, and humanitarian circumstances in East Timor, and the prospects for stability in the short to mid-term?
- What form is any new UN mission to East Timor likely to take, and what is the United States advocating on that subject? Recent public remarks by U.S. Ambassador to the UN, John Bolton, implied skepticism about any future UN peacekeeping role, even though the Secretary General has not yet submitted his recommendations for future UN presence, as requested by the Security Council.
- Has the United States been penny-wise but pound-foolish in its approach to East Timor during the past couple years? In other words, by pushing for a more rapid drawdown of UN presence than some experts were advising, and by proposing reduced levels of bilateral assistance even before Timor has access to the full income from its oil revenues, did we increase the possibility of the increased costs that the world is now facing as the result of the recent upheaval?
- And finally, what lessons does the recent unrest hold for future activities within East Timor by multilateral and bilateral donors, as well as by the Timorese government itself? For example, has it affected the relative priority of broad-based economic development, job creation, and professional police training?

I look forward to the testimony of the Deputy Assistant Secretary.